

## The Beautiful side of Ugly, the Living side of Death.

(Summarised transcription of Dhamma talk no.171hh)

**Q:** AN 7.49

*Bhikkhus, these seven perceptions, when developed and frequently practised, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.*

*What seven?*

- 1-The perception of the ugly,
- 2- the perception of death,
- 3- the perception of the other side(*paṭikūlasaññā*) of food/eating
- 4- the perception of non-delight in regard to the whole world,
- 5- the perception of anicca,
- 6- the perception of dukkha in anicca,
- 7- the perception of anatta in dukkha.

*These seven perceptions, when developed and frequently practised, are of great fruit and great benefit. They are included in the deathless and bring the deathless to its conclusion.*

*1- When the perception of the ugly is developed and frequently practised, it is of great fruit and great benefit. That is what I said and in reference to what was, it said?*

*When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either upekkha or the other side/*pāṭikulyatā* (the opposite direction of what the mind is attending to, *paṭikkūlamanasikāram*, I believe is a synonym for *yonisomanasikaram*,) gets established.*

*Just as a chicken's feather thrown into the fire shrinks back and shrivels. In the same way, a Bhikkhu whose mind is accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, his mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse. If a Bhikkhu whose mind is accustomed to the perception of ugly aims at sexual intercourse or does not have the other side(*patikula*) established. He should know " for me the perception of ugly is not developed, for me there is no difference in former distinction, for me, there is no strong development." In that way he considers.*

*If however, When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of ugly, and often lives with such a purpose, His mind shrinks back, goes in the opposite direction and turns away from engaging in sexual intercourse, and either upekkha or the other side (*patikula*) gets established." He should know " for me the perception of ugly is well developed, for me, there is a difference in former distinction, for me, there is a strong development." In that way he considers.*

*Bhikkhus, When the perception of the ugly is developed and frequently practised, it is of great fruit and great benefit. It brings the deathless to its culmination and conclusion..."*

The term "*paṭikūla*" is usually translated as 'repulsive' but it's literally the 'other/opposite side'.

**Nm:** It's the side that is simultaneously there with the beautiful. And in order to discern it, you

need to see through the beauty that is present. The opposite side of beauty cannot be found somewhere else. Like, two sides of a coin, you don't seek a second coin to see the other side of this coin. It's the same coin but now you need to see the opposite side, the one you're not looking at. And the reason why that's so important is that the most common way people practice *asubha* is as a response to the beautiful, as in, they want to get rid of the beautiful and replace it with the ugly. Which means you see those things as separate from each other. You're not seeing the ugly within that beautiful, which is how you would cancel(undermine) the attraction to the beautiful, by seeing the opposite side of it (within it). But instead, you're just trying to get rid of the beautiful because it bothers you and replace it with ugly because that supposedly does not bother you or it shouldn't bother you as much if you want to practice restraint. But in reality, what you're doing, is just acting on account of how you feel.

So the beauty is there bothering you and you just want to be free from bother, which is fine. But how do you go about it? You go about blaming the beautiful for the disturbance. Which means you don't really know where the bother is and it's not in the beautiful. The lustful attraction is not in the beautiful. It's in your attitude towards it.

**Q:** Because you don't see the nature of that beautiful thing that's why you're attracted to it.

**Nm:** Exactly, and you will not see its nature, because now you think "the attraction is in the beautiful, so all I need to do is replace the beautiful with images of ugly, and then I'm free from attraction". No, and that's exactly what happened to many monks who were practising wrongly. They started getting attracted to the ugly, to the disgusting things, to corpses and so on. Because they were wrongly attending.

The right attention it's how you attend those things, within them. So while beautiful is present, you have a chance to discern correctly, '*yonisomanasikara*', to attend correctly, to attend to the opposite side that's there implicitly. Which is why freedom from the side that is beautiful is possible. You don't have to do anything in response to it, you just need to see through it. And that's why, if you actually develop that '*patikulamanasikara*', it then doesn't matter, what type of beautiful perception you encounter, later on, the mind remains equally developed in regard to it, the mind sees through it, because it has seen through its nature which is universal. And when you see through the nature of beauty, as inseparable from ugly, then you realize that the beautiful is just less ugly, not as ugly, but still ugly. Which means it starts serving as a basis for dispassion.

**Q:** So how do you cultivate the perception of ugly or these other perceptions that the Buddha has encouraged? How would you establish your mind in the ugly right now? How would you do that? How would you discern the opposite side?

**Nm:** You need to check your mind, "Is there lust here now?", as in, is there presently enduring attraction to beautiful, right here, right now? Then the answer is no, but then, could there be lust in your mind, as in, in the future, "Is my mind liable to become attracted again to something of

sensual nature?"

The point is, you want to recognize that the possibility of lust, aversion, delusion, manifesting in your experience is already the lust, aversion, delusion, in your experience, just on a subtler level. How would you know this possibility of lust arising in the future unless that possibility of lust is already present right here, right now, which is how you know it.

The possibility of lust is there because the basis for lust is there, you haven't abandoned it. So circumstantially, you're not particularly, experiencing any lust right here right now. But the whole basis, the whole domain of being liable to lust is still there. You haven't abandoned it. So can these things arise in the future? Yes, means you're presently maintaining the basis, and when the conditions are right, lust will arise on account of the basis that is being maintained.

What is the basis for lust arising?

**Q:** Valuing of pleasure

**Nm:** Exactly, so you're not engaging in any sensual pleasure now, yet you're maintaining the view that that pleasure is valuable. Which is enough to maintain the basis for future lust to arise. However, if you see the extent of the danger of that wrong view that pleasure is valuable, you will free yourself from sensuality. As the Buddha once said, "For as long as I did not understand the extent of the danger in regard to gratification, I did not claim to be fully free from sensual desires. But when I understood the danger, then I understood the escape, then I claimed to be fully free from sensual desires".

So within the beautiful, the opposite side of the beautiful is the danger defined by that beautiful. The danger is the attraction to the beautiful which is based upon the *asubha*/the ugly.

The development of that perception of danger means the discernment of the implicit characteristics of what you are attending. The chief of those characteristics being the danger. Having discerned the implicit danger long enough, you will not need to maintain that perception because it's not something that you created, it's something that you have uncovered.

**Q:** The sutta continues:

*"2-... When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of death, their mind draws back from attachment to life, and either upekkha or the other side gets established...  
(continues as above) ... "*

**Nm:** The perception of death is the counterpart of this life here, you can't just get rid of life in order to see what death is, which is how people usually practice, *asubha*, get rid of the *subha* and then replace it with *asubha*.

So 'the other side' means that it's there simultaneously present at the same time within

whatever you're attending. Death is simultaneously present as the other side of life. Even if you don't attend to it necessarily. You're not attending the fact that you're alive, you're just taking it for granted. That doesn't matter, in its nature, death is implicit. And it wouldn't be implicit if there is no life. In the same sense, the ugly would not be implicit if there were no beautiful.

So instead of following the direction that taking your life for granted, offers, you start discerning that - whenever there is life, death is implicit. You will then experience disenchantment with life, and it will be impossible for you to remain attracted to it.

**Q:** The result of seeing death then is that whatever is happening in life won't bother you because the passion for it has been removed.

**Nm:** Yes, because passion is not the product of life. Passion is the product of you thinking or having a view, that life is yours, that life is in your control, that life is not subject to change, that life will not end, that our life will last forever. All those are implicit notions that you have towards life. And hence passion.

If you remove the misconceptions towards life, there is no longer a basis for passion. But, again, as I said, you cannot remove the misconceptions by denying life. You cannot remove misconceptions about the beautiful by trying to constantly get rid of it and deny it. You remove misconceptions by allowing beautiful to endure and then seeing through it.

If a sensual thought manifests, it says in the suttas that one must "obliterate it, destroy it, get rid of it...etc". But how do you do that? It doesn't say that you must deny its existence. No. You get rid of it by not welcoming it, by not delighting in it, by not entertaining it. That's how you get rid of it 'indirectly', so to speak. You get rid of the sensual thought or you get rid of the intoxication with life, by not carelessly welcoming it, delighting in it, entertaining it. So when it arises on its own, you must not welcome it, which doesn't mean that you must go out of your way and try and chase it away. No, you must just make sure that you remain mindful of not welcoming it with any gesture, and if you do that long enough, the thing will go away.

**Q:** And again, you don't have to go and seek out death or possibility of death because it's already there.

**Nm:** If you seek it out, it means you still imply with your view that the problem is in those individual things that you're now seeking out to prove to yourself that you are not subjected to them. Just ask yourself, "Am I subject to this?" Yes. So what is there to seek out when it's already here? Can future lust manifest in me in the future? I'm not sure, means yes. Unless you know that it can't, that's the basis for - Yes it can. So if you seek out individual examples of lust to prove to yourself that you're not lustful, means you're lustful, and you still think the problem is in those individual things that you perceive, not in your mind of welcoming, delighting, entertaining.

So you can ask, am I subject to death? Will I be affected if my life were to end next second? Yes, there you go. I don't know. There you go. You will. So how can you then free yourself from death without denying life by seeing the danger in life and removing slightest passion towards life, while life is still there? And then you know, it's the passion that kept me bound to life, that keeps you subject to death. Not life in itself. Hence freedom from life is possible without needing to die. And that's why when you do die as the Buddha would say, you will not be reappearing anywhere else. Because you have severed any bond with the entire domain of samsara.

Death is where life is, if you remove passion towards life, there is no basis for death to apply to you any longer.

**Q:** The sutta continues:

*"3-...When a Bhikkhu becomes accustomed to the perception of the other side(patikula) of food/eating, their mind draws back from craving for taste, and either upekkha or the other side gets established..."*

**Nm:** Your ignorant default mode is that you prioritize the pleasure of eating. That's what you put first. So even when you're starving, losing the sight of that as the reason for your eating, you will be automatically eating out of pleasure for the taste, not because of the need for food.

The 'other side' of the eating is that it's 'something you have to do'. It's a necessity. But by taking that necessity for granted, by covering it up as a necessity, you then get picky, you start preferencing tastes and start acting out of tastes. But it doesn't matter how much you act out of taste, it's still within the necessity. You still need to eat. That's the horrible thing.

The pressure of eating is there, but you ignore that because you take food for granted and then on account of it you develop the priority of tastes, the priority of pleasure. Which is fully within that necessity. So all you need to do is uncover the fundamental need so that you see it as that which comes first and tastes as second, not the other way around. By covering up that need, that pressure, that hunger, that unpleasantness of being subjected to it, you put joy for the taste first, you put pleasure first. If you don't ignore the fact that food is a necessity that you're presently subjected to, whether you're starving or not, you will then not lose the context of why you need to eat. No matter how agreeable or disagreeable the eating is, it's still within the unpleasant fact of hunger. So when the hunger disappears, you stop eating.

**Q:** In the Dhammapada verse 203:

*"Hunger is the foremost illness; Determinations are the foremost dis-ease. For one knowing this, as it really is; Nibbana is the foremost ease"*

**Nm:** Hunger is an affliction and your way of dealing with the affliction is not freeing yourself from being liable to affliction altogether but in just finding the pleasurable aspects of affliction. So you're not dealing with it, you're just managing it, covering it up.

**Q:** So that enjoyment of taste, cooking, recipes etc, comes out of putting that pleasure first and

putting that 'other side', that necessity of food second.

**Nm:** It'll be impossible to make the effort towards taste if you are dispassionate towards taste on account of seeing the necessity first. That doesn't mean that you will not taste if something's agreeable, it just means that it would be impossible for any amount of agreeable or disagreeable taste to disturb your mind or to pervert the right order again, by putting first which is second and putting second which is first.

Taste is always second to hunger, but for you, the taste is the first, craving is the first, everything else is second, you even forget that you eat out of hunger. Which is why people eat when they're not hungry because the pleasure of taste is now the criteria. Doesn't matter how refined the criteria you might have developed, it's still within the need of hunger. If there's no need for food, you wouldn't be engaging with food.